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ABSTRACT

The pedagogical usefulness of contrastive analysis (CA) is examined and suggestions are offered on ways to use it in foreign language instruction, with particular reference to instruction in English as a Second Language in India. Some of the literature that maintains that CA is almost useless to language teachers is reviewed and answered. The particular points in the literature discussed are the following: (1) the importance of native language interference, (2) the extent to which a language can be broken down into "easy" and "difficult" parts, (3) the predictive power of CA, and (4) the failure of CA to provide the experienced language teacher with new and useful information. The suggestions offered as to how CA can be most profitably used in the language teaching situation deal with the preparation of remedial materials, supplementary exercises, and question papers based on CA. A distinction is made between linguistic and pedagogical grammars and it is suggested that research findings in CA be written in a form that can be easily understood by the teacher who will use it. (AMH)

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CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS AND ITS PEDAGOGIC IMPLICATIONS*

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This is a time when it has become academically fashionable to lose one's faith in the pedagogical usefulness of Contrastive Analysis (hereafter CA). Pedagogically oriented CA has been attacked on various grounds mainly during the second half of the sixties and the early seventies as a result of which the Second/Foreign Language Specialists now tend to dismiss CA as almost entirely useless for their purpose. This paper, which falls into two parts, examines in Part I some of the important charges against CA in some detail and tries to establish that (a) none of these charges can really be sustained and (b) there is no real alternative to CA. In Part II, an attempt has been made to work out in what specific ways CA can be most fruitfully used in language teaching.

I

Pedagogically-oriented CA attempts to help the language teacher by suggesting to him what items in the target-language—sound-segments, sound-patterns, grammatical structures, lexical items, etc.,- are likely to cause learning problems for the pupils so that he can pay more attention to the teaching of these items. These are identified by comparing the systems of the native language of the learner (hereafter L_1) and the target language (hereafter L_2) at all levels—phonological, syntactic and lexico-semantic. Those areas where the systems of the L_2 differ from those of the L_1 are then listed. Thus CA provides the language teacher with what has been called "a differential grammar." (Nickel, 1971 : 9). CA is based on the hypothesis that the L_1 habits of the learner are likely to adversely affect his acquisition of L_2 habits where the systems of L_2 are different from those of L_1, since he tends to transfer the L_1 systems to L_2—both while trying to understand an utterance in L_2 and also while trying to express himself in L_2, although the problems in the latter situation are more difficult.

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* This paper is a revised version of Chapter II of my Research Diploma dissertation.

If CA has failed to inspire the confidence of the pedagogists today, it is because of several factors. Some of these are internal to CA and some rather external to it. The extraneous factors, which I shall state but not discuss in detail, are mainly the following:

(a) linguistics, in general, is held in distrust so far as its pedagogical application is concerned, both by language teaching experts and by linguists themselves, and

(b) researches in psychology have not as yet provided us with any significant insight into the nature and process of second/foreign language acquisition including the precise nature of interference caused by L_1 in L_2 learning.

The point in mentioning these factors is to draw our attention to the currently prevailing atmosphere of distrust, among pedagogists, of any proposal—sound or unsound—coming from linguists. CA, naturally, also becomes a victim to this general distrust.

CA itself has been attacked on both theoretical and practical considerations. Some of the more important charges against the theory of CA are as follows: (a) It is said to be based on a wrong view of the learners' mistakes. Ignorance of L_2 patterns and not L_1 interference is said to be the real cause of the errors that the learners make. (b) CA is said to be based on a wrong view of language structure, and (c) it is said to encourage a piecemeal theory of learning.

On the practical plane, dissatisfaction with the CA arose because (d) it does not predict all errors and its predictions do not always come true, (e) it does not account for all the errors that the learners make, and (f) it does not give the language teacher any significantly new information about the learners' errors that he did not know through experience. Now we shall examine these charges in some detail.

(a) Newmark and Reibel (1968) have attempted to explain those errors which are generally accounted for in terms of L_1 interference in a different way. They suggest that ignorance of the L_2 systems is the real cause of such errors, and thus attack the very foundation on which CA is based. The relevant passage is the following:

"But how can we understand the phenomenon of foreign accent without resorting to the notion of interference? Our account is something like this: A person knows how to speak one language, say his native one. Now he tries to speak another one; but in his early stages of learning the new one, there are many things he has not yet learned to do; that is, he is grossly undertrained in the new one. But he is induced to perform

('perform' may mean understand, speak, read or write) in that new one by an external teacher, or by his internal desire to say something. What can he do other than use what he already knows to make up for what he does not know? To an observer who knows the target language, the learner will seem to be substituting the native habits for target habits. But from the learner's point of view, all he is doing is the best he can: to fill in his gaps of training he refers for help to what he already knows. The problem of 'interference' viewed thus reduces to the problem of ignorance, and the solution to the problem is simply more and better training in the target language, rather than systematic drill at the points of contrast between the two languages in order to combat interference." (pp. 159–160).

But Newmark and Reibel do not really give an alternative explanation to the theory L_1 interference. In a foreign language teaching situation, when does the teacher induce his pupil to perform in the foreign language? He does so *only after* he has taught that bit of the language which he wants his pupil to use now, and there is no conceivable situation in the context of foreign language teaching where the teacher induces a student to use a pattern of the target language without having earlier taught it. For example, the teacher can ask the student to use the "if-clause" only after he has taught the "if-clause."

No one will disagree with Newmark and Reibel if they suggest that the learner's ignorance of the particular form in question is responsible for the mistakes that he makes in using the form. If he knew the correct form, he would most certainly use it. But the question is, why was he not able to learn it when it was taught to him? What were the factors that were responsible for his inability to learn it? Could it not be that in some of these cases it is the pattern in the L_1 that has caused problems for the learner?

(b) Lee (1968) attacks CA on the ground that it treats language as if it is "a collection of separable and self-sufficient parts": therefore, "however much there is to be said for partial comparisons of languages in order to discover the nature of certain difficulties, it is unsound to regard language as consisting on the one hand of difficult parts or aspects and on the other hand of easy ones, the former to be taught and the latter to be left to look after themselves." (192).

Lee is entirely wrong in thinking that the so-called easy parts identified as such by CA are not to be taught properly. A teaching procedure using the insights from CA only emphasises that those items

which are identified as being potentially difficult for the learner should be given more than usual attention. This does not mean that the rest should be ignored altogether.

Lee is right in asserting that language is not an inventory of parts, each complete within itself, which are not organically related to one another. So logically it is unsound to break language into components. He is also right in saying that no items in a language are inherently 'easy' or 'difficult.' But he misses the point that in any language teaching situation, fragmentation of language into different parts is inevitable. No one can teach the whole language to someone else, language learning being a continuous process going on throughout life, and there is absolutely no disagreement on the view that only selected portions from the language (we need not go into the manner of selection here) can be taught, which means that breaking up of language into bits is an inescapable reality in foreign language teaching. This artificiality is thus inherent in foreign language teaching.

Similarly 'easy' and 'difficult' are necessary concepts in pedagogy. Not merely the items in a language, but nothing else in the world of experience and thought is perhaps inherently easy or difficult to comprehend or teach. Yet pedagogy simply cannot dispense with these notions. A morphological inflection of the English verb in the simple present tense, when it has a grammatical subject which is in the third person and singular number, is not inherently more complex than the "if clause" in English. But one cannot for that reason say that for an Oriya speaker learning English as a foreign language *Geeta likes mangoes* is likely to prove as difficult as *If Geeta stands first, I shall be happy*. Ease or difficulty in learning is not the consequence of some inherent property of the item to be learnt; it is due to a whole lot of complex factors like the teachability of the learning items, the environment in which the teaching takes place, the age and the background of the learner, and above all, a number of psychological factors in the teaching situation like the learner's and perhaps even the teacher's attitude, motivation, etc.

Therefore if CA identifies some linguistic items as potentially difficult for the learner, it is because it operates within the framework of pedagogy.

(c) Newmark and Reibel's (1968) charge that CA seems to support a wrong theory of learning—learning a language "one bit at a time" (161) arises out of their misconception of the language teaching situation on the one hand and of the nature of CA on the other. They argue that if the

theory that one learns a language one bit at a time were correct, it would be impossible to account for a child's mastery of the structures of his native language within a short period of time, and also an adult's commendable command of the new language within what *is* certainly a short span of time when the complexity of the language is taken into account.

But what Newmark and Reibel fail to note is that all teaching involves cutting the total of what is to be taught into parts, each consisting of a few related items, organising these parts into a hierarchical order of difficulty, and teaching one part—if not one item—at a time. This is true of language teaching also. No parallel need be struck between the L_1 acquisition and the L_2 learning from this point of view, for the simple reason that whereas the L_2 has to be taught, the L_1 does not have to be taught in the same sense. So not only cutting language into units, but also teaching one unit at a time is a pedagogical inevitability.

The point which is often missed is that CA does not support any teaching methodology which demands that language should be taught in bits. Again, it does not lend support to the view, as Hadlich (1965 : 426) thinks, that the so-called "problem pairs" in vocabulary should be taught at the same time. CA is neutral with regard to any particular language teaching methodology; it does not in itself prescribe any particular approach to language teaching. CA done for pedagogical uses provides us with a differential grammar; how this grammar is to be taught, is something entirely beyond the province of CA. For instance, CA can tell us that an Oriya learner of English is likely to find the use of "since" and "for" difficult. But whether the correct patterns involving these items should be taught through pattern practice or by drawing the learner's attention to the rule for the distribution of "since" and "for" in English, whether these items should be taught together, or separately, or in some other way, is an issue totally extraneous to CA. There is nothing in CA itself that demands or supports a particular language teaching technique.

(d) The predictive power of CA has been seriously questioned. Few today are likely to agree with Lado (1957 : vii) that "...we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning, and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student." It is generally held that though the predictions of CA are by and large correct at the phonological level, they are much less accurate at the syntactic level. J.G. Bruton (1965 : 121) attempts to account for it by saying that"...the problems in this area, while presumably limited in number, are

so numerous as almost to defy analysis." Another way of explaining it might be to maintain that transfer at the syntactic level does not function in exactly the same way as it does at the level of phonology; that is to say, whereas it might be possible to maintain that the occurrence of some sound-segments, sound-patterns, etc., in the learner's L_1 would make the learning of the same or similar items in L_2 easy, it cannot be said in the same way that occurrence of a certain syntactic pattern in one's L_1 necessarily facilitates one's control of the similar pattern in L_2. In this connection, Frank Palmer (1973 : 262) says, "Research is required to find out whether certain kinds of linguistic knowledge in one language facilitate the acquisition of similar knowledge in another. For instance, how relevant is it that a language has a passive or how relevant that the passive involves features similar to that of English, when the pupil tries to learn the English passive ?"

To my mind, it is Jacquelyn Schachter (1974: 205–214) who provides the most satisfactory account of this phenomenon. She observes that at the syntactic level choices are available to the learner when he tries to perform in L_2 whereas there are hardly any such choices available to him at the phonological level. Therefore whereas the learner can successfully avoid using the syntactic patterns that he does not know well, he cannot, in a very large number of situations, avoid using the sound-segments or sound-patterns while performing in L_2.

Jacquelyn Schachter convincingly argues that on the basis of the findings of error analysis one cannot arrive at any valid conclusion with regard to the predictive power of CA. She found from her error analysis that contrary to the prediction of CA it is Chinese and Japanese students who made fewer mistakes in their use of English relative clauses than Persian and Arabic students. She says, one should not conclude from this that the prediction of CA has been falsified, since what really happened is, whereas Persian and Arabic students produced more relative clauses, Chinese and Japanese students avoided them and used them only when they were sure of being correct. All the critics of CA who have argued that CA has very little predictive power, have based their charge on the actual performance of the learners. But as we have seen, performance does not always reflect all the problems of the learner. Therefore the claim that the predictions of CA scarcely come true, cannot be sustained on the basis of learners' performance. One has also to look at the comprehension of the students in order to bring up such a charge, since as Schachter says, "CA apriori is neutral between comprehension and production." (213)

No one has done it yet ; therefore in the absence of satisfactory evidence, one cannot in a conclusive way reject the predictive power of CA.

(e) It is obviously unfair to blame CA for its failure to predict *all* problem areas and account for *all* errors that the learners make. (Corder, S.P., 1967: 161–170). This is like asking physics to tell us why the world began or what happens to the soul after death, and then blaming it for not being able to enlighten us on these matters. Each discipline, the critics of CA often seem to forget, functions within its own limitations, and so does CA. It can account for errors which are due to the L_1 interference alone. Errors have other sources like idiosyncratic features within the target language itself, and it is not within the scope of CA to say anything about such errors.

(f) Pit Corder brings up the charge that CA has failed to provide the language teacher with any new and useful information—"Teachers have not always been very impressed by this contribution from the linguist for the reason that their practical experience has usually already shown them where these difficulties lie and they have not felt that the contribution of the linguist has provided them with say significantly new information." (162)

The word "teacher" can be misleading without any attributes. What Pit Corder says can perhaps be valid only in the case of experienced and competent teachers, and it is a matter of common knowledge that at least in countries like India foreign language teachers of great sophistication are rather rare. CA can certainly do a great service to the language teaching situation if it can make explicit, within the limits of its own field, what the experienced and perceptive teacher knows. And this is exactly what it attempts to do for the benefit of hundreds of language teachers who do not have any exceptional ability or sufficient experience in the field. English language teaching in India, to be specific, is a vast enterprise, and it demands the service of a very large number of competent teachers. But as things stand today, an alarmingly vast majority of teachers engaged in teaching English at different stages, can hardly be credited with any special competence or aptitude for the job. Even this might appear to be a kind of understatement. All these teachers can benefit if they have before them for reference, a systematically drawn up list of items that are likely to prove difficult for the learner, so that they might forearm themselves to tackle such problems in the class as and when they arise on account of L_1 interference.

Even granting for the sake of argument that CA does not provide any new information to the experienced and competent language teacher that

he does not already have, it still cannot be said that it has no use for him. To know something by virtue of one's insight is one thing, and to find that what one knows through his theoretical confirmation is yet another. One works with much greater faith in one's convictions and consequently works much more efficiently than before, if he knows that his views have support from a reliable discipline. This is precisely what CA can do for the competent language teacher—it can give him faith in himself.

Thus we have seen that none of the charges against CA can really be sustained.

It is important to stress at this point that CA is in a way inevitable because (a) Not many today are likely to deny that mother tongue interference is a major source of errors in foreign language learning and (b) no one as far as I know, has yet come up with a satisfactory alternative to CA for dealing with the errors arising out of L_1 interference.

The only serious alternative to CA, as some wrongly believe, is error analysis. It is useful to examine here what precisely the goal of error analysis is. If it is to describe the errors only, CA is not relevant, since, as Halliday *et al* (1964 : 119) point out, these errors can be described with reference to the relevant features of the target language alone. For example, the error in *Geeta is having a costly car* can be described with reference to the system in English alone. This is what Halliday *et al* call the "diagnosis" of errors and for this contrastive information is not necessary. But if the purpose of making an error analysis is to help the teacher and the materials producer so that they might use the information for solving some of the learning problems, then surely mere description of errors cannot be said to make any useful pedagogical contribution. A study of the sources of the errors will then be necessary. The sources can be many: (a) The L_1 interference, (b) the idiosyncratic features within the target language itself, (c) over-generalization, (d) bad teaching, (e) interference from another language the pupil might have learnt before learning the language in question, and (f) several psychological factors including certain traits like shyness in the learner's personality. Since L_1 interference seems to be responsible for a large number of errors—almost half the number of errors—(Tran-Thi-Chau, 1975), CA will continue to be extremely useful for error analysis and language teaching. Thus, far from being as alternative to CA, meaningful error analysis is grossly incomplete without it.

II

Now I intend to offer some suggestions concerning how, to my mind, the findings of CA can be most profitably used in the teaching situation.

I also intend to discuss briefly a couple of points regarding how we should go about doing a pedagogically oriented contrastive analysis.

To put it quite specifically, the findings of CA can be best used in the preparation of remedial materials, and supplementary language exercises, and in designing question papers which are meant to test the linguistic ability of the learner.

I propose to distinguish between a teaching grammar and a remedial grammar, which must incorporate the differential grammar prepared by the contrastivist, in the same way as we distinguish between a teaching text and a bridge text.

This observation arises out of the following considerations :

(a) If a teaching text is based primarily on the findings of CA and/or error analysis, there is a danger that such a textbook will be boring, which means that such a text simply cannot be used for the purpose of teaching. Let us assume, for instance, that a high school leaver in Orissa who has no English-medium school background and whose command of the basic English patterns is shaky, makes mistakes in the use of the progressive and the perfective aspects and the conditionals in English. If a textbook is written for use as primary reading materials in the Pre-University class, and if in this textbook these items are used again and again, the chances are that the students will find the book totally uninteresting, in which case it will serve absolutely no useful purpose.

(b) It is often not possible to write a textbook on the findings of CA particularly when it is to be used for the beginners. Lee (1968) cites his own experience in this connection. While preparing a beginner's course in English for the Greek children, he found from the available published materials that the potential problem items were numerous. He lists the following items as some of the areas of difficulty at the level of syntax alone—".....the articles, personal pronouns, possessives and relative pronouns, emphatic and reflexive pronouns, gender, pronominal *one*, continuous tense-forms, the present perfect and the simple past, negative and interrogative forms of verbs, *do*, *must*, *can*, *be*, *have*, adverbs, prepositions, the gerund and the infinitive, the passive, *there is* and *there are*, the position of adjectives, and indefinite adjectives..." etc. (191-192). This, Lee observes, leaves hardly any choice for the course designer or the materials producer. He is not at all benefited by consulting such lists of potential problem areas, since almost each item in the target language seems to be a problem.

Taking all these into consideration I feel we can make the best use of the findings of CA if we apply them in the following manner :

(a) In the language textbooks, at the end of every five lessons or so, we can have an additional set of language exercises which can be largely based on those findings of CA that are relevant at that stage.

(b) Students' Workbooks can be prepared on the basis of the findings of CA.

(c) Let us assume that a student has to learn English for eight years as in Orissa before he goes on to do his special courses. During this span of time, three one-month remedial courses can be organised for him at the end of the second, sixth and eighth years of his learning English. The whole bulk of materials (bridge texts, remedial grammars, etc.) to be used in such courses can be based on the findings of CA and error analysis.

(d) A part of the language question paper can be devoted to testing the learner's command of those items which CA has identified as potential learning problems.

I would like to lend my support to the view that doing CA for pedagogical use is not such a stupendous task as Lee (1968 : 190) and Bruton (1965 : 122). seem to think it to be. Comparison of two linguistic systems is, no doubt, a very ambitious project. There is no denying this fact. We do not know enough about the systems of even one language. Bolinger, (1972 : 267) for instance, says that although the transformationalists began studying the "some-any distribution in English" in the early sixties, they have not yet been able to arrive at a satisfactory generalization about it. This shows how very difficult it is to discover the complete structure of any one language and to formulate it rigorously. The programme of doing this for two languages and then of working out a contrastive grammar on the basis of these findings is of course hopelessly ambitious. But the central question is, what are the objectives of such a comparison ? If one is comparing the systems of two languages to arrive at a conclusion about the linguistic universals, his study will be very different in nature, scope and methodology from another's who is interested in comparing two linguistic systems for the benefit of a pedagogist who is interested in using the findings of this study for producing teaching materials. As Denis Girard (1972 : 11), says, the latter study should aim at "a practical comparison between the language to be taught and the pupils' mother tongue." I entirely agree with Banathy *et al.*, (1966 : 40),

when they suggest that, "The developer of a foreign language course, however, will be satisfied with less than a list of all possible differences. The collection of target elements of a language course will constitute a selective listing of contrastive findings. The kind and number of items selected will be determined by the expected terminal behaviour of the student and influenced by the available learning time."

Let us assume that someone is preparing a lexical contrastive study of the Oriya and English verbs, as has been done in Patnaik, 1974 for the use of pedagogists who want to offer a remedial course to the new entrants to colleges coming from Oriya-medium schools. In the beginning the contrastivist must decide which verbs he is going to study since he need not study all the verbs for the simple reason that the student at that level is not expected to be familiar with all the verbs in the target language. Let us say he is expected to have learnt the verb *see*. So the contrastivist must include this verb in his work. Then the next important decision for him to make is which of the meanings of the verb *see* he is going to take into account in his study. *See*, as we know, has several meanings. *See*, for instance, means, "Call up a picture of; imagine" in the sentence *I can't see myself allowing people to cheat me* (Hornby, *et al*, 1963 : 899) *See* means "have a knowledge or experience of" in the sentence *This coat of mine has seen hard wear* or *He has seen a good deal in his long life* (ibid). But these meanings of *see* need not be within the range of a college entrant. Therefore the contrastivist will do well to ignore these meanings altogether while making his verb-analysis.

Similar decisions have got to be taken with regard to the syntactic features of the language as well. Thus we can end up with a useful contrastive study of the systems of the two languages in question which can be directly used in the remedial programme envisaged above.

A very important problem that has not received the attention it deserves is the presentation of the findings of CA. "Where the relevant information (sentence stress, or rhythm, and intonation worked out by professional linguists) is available", says Baird (1967 : 135), "the form in which it appears in publications in linguistics makes it rather indigestible for the average teacher." Robin Lakoff (1972 : 73) also stresses the need of presenting the information and insights gained in pedagogically-oriented linguistic research in a manner "immediately accessible" to the language teacher. She is of opinion that it is better to state the passive rule in the traditional way—"To form the passive, exchange the subject and the direct object noun phrases of a transitive verb, insert the verb *to be* after the

auxiliary if there is one, and put any verb following *be* in its past participle form" (ibid)—than to do so in a formal manner:

NP	-	Aux	-	V	-	X	-	NP_2	-	Y	-	by+Passive	-	Z	=
1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8	
5	-	2	+	be	+	en	-	3	-	4	-	7+1	-	6	- - 8

If it is intended for use by the language teacher because "this (the traditional statement) is simple and concise, it avoids the difficulty of first explaining the terminology NP_1, —, +, and so on, and makes things much less mysterious..." (ibid).

The manner of presentation of the findings of research depends on who the potential consumers of the research are. It is obvious that a book on linguistics meant for the linguists must be written in a form very different from the one meant for the laymen. A linguists' grammar and a pedagogic grammar much differ in the manner of presentation, as much as they do in their goals and contents.

The "consumers" of a pedagogically-motivated contrastive grammar are (a) the course designer, (b) the materials producer, (c) the classroom teacher, and (d) the question paper setter. Often the teacher is the course designer and the paper setter, and if he is not the textbook writer, he too has to produce teaching materials from time to time, to supplement the textbooks. The teachers thus are the main 'consumers' of contrastive grammar. Therefore it should be written in a form "immediately accessible" to him. The contrastivist must make use of the grammatical terminology with which a teacher is supposed to be familiar and must record his findings in simple prose, so that the teacher does not have to do hard work at home to understand the "differential grammar." This is an important thing the contrastivist has always got to bear in mind in order to be useful to the language teacher.

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